

Lesson Classification: UNCLASSIFIED

Lesson ID: 92559-34468

Title: OPERATIONS AT RIO HATO

Operation/Exercise Name: MARFOR PROMOTE LIBERTY Observed: 13 Jun 1990

Originator: COMMARFOR PANAMA

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5. (U) OBSERVATION:

Part of low intensity conflict (LIC) is to provide security to captured facilities.

6. (U) DISCUSSION:

The Panamanian Defense Force (PDF) Base at Rio Hato, about 110km west of the Canal was a major PDF training facility. United States (U.S.) Army forces seized it early in the JUST CAUSE invasion and PDF forces there were defeated or disappeared. After the invasion a refueling site was established there and an Special Forces (SF) detachment was billeted in a compound within the base. Initially an Army cavalry troop was stationed there to provide security and prevent looting of the base. In March, Marine Forces (MARFOR) Panama relieved the Army and established a small task force there. In addition to security of the base itself, MARFOR asked for and was given an area of operations (AO) about 35km by 35km in which to conduct reconnaissance and presence operations. The MARFOR task force consisted of a rifle platoon and an Light Armored Infantry (LAI) platoon. The reconnaissance/presence mission was accomplished in the following manner. During the day the LAI platoon used its mobility to reach out into the far reaches of the AO. Using its durability and versatility, the vehicle was able to negotiate the difficult terrain within the AO. Furthermore, the drawing power of the vehicle was used to work crowds and further our goals of establishing a positive presence. Initial feedback from the populous was that they were afraid of the Light Armored Vehicle (LAV) at night. Therefore, nightly High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV) patrols were performed by the rifle platoon to enable us to maintain a relatively continuous presence throughout the AO. Also, the HMMWVs were able to enter many towns that the LAVs could not due to their size. We found that extended range LAI operations are feasible, but that maintenance support from the

rear is vital and a substantial parts block should be embarked with the platoon. By utilizing resupply flights and surface logistic runs, operations could be supported throughout the AO. Operating out within the populous allowed them to become comfortable with the presence of our forces, therefore directly contributing to a higher quantity of information being gathered. The addition of a small intelligence detachment facilitated collection and analysis of information gathered. Intelligence was regularly exchanged with the SF detachment. By late April the political situation brought a curtailment of patrols in the larger AO and the LAI platoon was withdrawn and the rifle platoon was limited to training and local security aboard the base. On 31 May 1990 all U.S. Forces were withdrawn from Rio Hato and the base turned over to the Panamanians.

7. (U) LESSON LEARNED:
None stated.

8. (U) RECOMMENDED ACTION:
None stated. Provided for
informational purposes only.

9. (U) COMMENTS:
None stated.

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